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What's in the 'co'?

Tending the tensions in co-creative inquiry in social work education

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# What's in the 'co'? Tending the tensions in cocreative inquiry in social work education

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## **PRE-PUBLICATION VERSION**

### **What's in the 'co'? Tending the context-specific tensions of co-creative inquiry in social work education**

**Louise Phillips and Ksenija Napan**

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## **What's in the 'co'? Tending the context-specific tensions of co-creative inquiry in social work education**

**Abstract.** Higher education is one of many fields of practice that have undergone a so-called 'dialogic turn' whereby processes of co-creation proliferate as a means of generating knowledge. According to dialogic ideals, co-creation harnesses the transformative potential of dialogue across difference and empowers participants as co-learners or co-researchers. But what does the 'co' of 'co-creation' entail in practice? The aim of the article is to explore the tensions in the 'co' of co-creation through critical, reflexive analysis of the enactment of one particular approach to co-creation, 'Academic Co-Creative Inquiry' (ACCI), in a social work course in a higher educational institution in Aotearoa New Zealand. Using the Integrated Framework for Analysing Dialogic Knowledge Production and Communication, the analysis identifies tensions arising in the interplay between top-down and bottom-up dynamics in a contested terrain of dialogic and neoliberal discourses. It is argued that ACCI's reflexive sensitivity in relation to tensions offers some resistance to neoliberalism in higher education.

**Keywords:** academic co-creative inquiry;; dialogue; Integrated Framework for Analysing Dialogic Knowledge Production and Communication; neo-liberal discourse; tensions

## Introduction

This article addresses inquiry-based learning in higher education as part of the so-called ‘dialogic turn’ in the production and communication of knowledge, a general societal tendency in which practices of *co-creation* are widespread across diverse fields of social practice as a means of generating new knowledge, often with a view to practice change (Aubert & Soler, 2006; Gomez, Puigvert & Flecha, 2011; Phillips, 2011; Phillips et al., 2012, 2013). As well as inquiry-based learning, other practices of co-creation in the dialogic turn include collaborative research, public engagement with science, citizen involvement in public administration and urban planning, inter-organisational and inter-professional collaboration in person-centred social work and health care, and ‘bottom-up’ organisational change.

In the dialogic turn, ‘communication’ is configured as ‘dialogue’ whereby knowledge is ‘co-created collaboratively’ through the ‘participation’ of different social actors and articulation of multiple knowledge forms (Gómez, Puigvert & Flecha, 2011; Phillips, 2011). ‘Dialogue’ has become a buzzword with a taken-for-granted positive value, which together with the related buzzwords, ‘co-creation’, ‘collaboration’, ‘participation’, and ‘empowerment’ - promises democratic, participatory processes. Participants in dialogue, it is claimed, are ‘empowered’ as participants, co-learners, co-creators, co-researchers or dialogue partners as opposed to clients, informants, consumers, pupils or target groups (e.g., Coenen, 2010; Dietz & Stern, 2008; Fung & Olin, 2003; Wilsdon & Willis, 2004). According to dialogic ideals, expert knowledge is democratised as the authorised knowledge of mainstream research relinquishes its monopoly on truth, and multiple ways of knowing are recognised as legitimate knowledge forms. ‘Difference’ is viewed as a transformative, generative force in the co-construction of meanings in dialogue. Implicit here is the normative hope that, by harnessing difference as a transformative force, dialogue can create new knowledge (Tsoukas, 2009) and further co-existence across differences, including differences of professional background and organisational position, theoretical and

epistemological perspective, age, gender, ethnicity and social class (Deetz & Simpson, 2004; Roberts, 2002).

A basic assumption in our article is that dialogue is generally fraught with tensions emanating from the play of power/knowledge whereby certain knowledge forms dominate and others are marginalised or excluded (e.g., Foucault, 1980; Phillips, 2011; Phillips et al, 2013). Moreover, the extent and specific nature of the tensions are shaped by the complexities of working across multiple knowledge forms and knowledge interests in particular socio-political conjunctures and organisational contexts (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Dutta & Pal, 2010; Phillips, 2011; Phillips et al, 2013; Stirling, 2008). Existing analyses highlight a general tendency across different fields of practice to underplay and neglect the tensions. Moreover, many of these analyses point out the role of the buzzwords of dialogue, co-creation, collaboration, participation and empowerment themselves in masking the tensions and romanticising dialogue (Carpentier & Dahlgren, 2011; Dutta & Pal, 2010; Phillips, 2011). It seems that, because the positive value of the buzzwords is often taken-for-granted, it is difficult to raise critical questions about practices constructed within their terms.

In our article, we go beyond the buzzwords and try to de-romanticise processes of co-creation. Our starting-point is that the tensions in play in the 'co' of 'co-creation' can be understood and practically tackled through critical, reflexive analysis of how they are played out in the enactment of 'co-creation' in particular organisational contexts and socio-political conjunctures. The aim of the article is to illustrate how context-specific tensions in the 'co' of co-creation can be explored through critical, reflexive analysis of a specific case. As a case, the article explores the tensions in an approach to inquiry-based learning called 'Academic Co-creative Inquiry' in a third year bachelor course on social work, 'Advanced Principles and Theory in Social Work', in a higher educational institution in Aotearoa New Zealand. In co-creative, collaborative fashion, we use the first author's theoretical approach, the Integrated Framework for Analysing Dialogic Knowledge

Production and Communication (IFADIA) (Phillips, 2011) to analyse the second author's Academic Co-creative Inquiry (ACCI) method of teaching and learning social work during the first author's research visit to Aotearoa New Zealand (February-June 2013).

Our analysis of tensions in the 'co' of co-creation on the social work course highlights context-specific tensions that arise from conflict between the discourse of dialogue and the discourse of neo-liberalism in the contested discursive terrain of higher education. In neoliberal discourse, higher educational institutions are configured as businesses competing in the 'global gknowledge economy', and education is conceived as a personal economic investment rather than, for example, a 'public good' designed to create educated citizens (Davies et al., 2006; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Shore, 2010, p.15; Strathern, 2000). Neoliberal discourse entails an instrumentalisation and individualisation of educational processes which conflicts with the stress in the discourse of dialogue on the importance of the *quality* of relations established among participants – respectful subject-subject relations – and on the intrinsic worth of the *process* of mutual learning (Gayá Wicks & Reason, 2009; Spencer & Taylor, 2007; Staunæs & Søndergaard, 2008). In our analysis, we adopt a Foucauldian perspective on discourse and power/knowledge which foregrounds how the discourse of neoliberalism and discourse of dialogue produce practices and subjectivities (Davies *et al.*, 2006; Davies & Bansel, 2007, 2010; Gill, 2010; Leathwood & Read, 2013). 'Context' is understood as co-constituted and emergent in practices rather than as an external, exogenous structure, constraining from the outside.

Existing research indicates that there has been a great deal of ideological critique of, but relatively little active resistance to, the colonisation of the academy by neoliberalism (e.g., Davies et al., 2006; Davies & Bansel, 2007, 2010; Gill, 2010; Leathwood & Read, 2013). Drawing on Foucauldian theory, the dearth of active resistance is partly attributed to the discursive inscription of academics as neoliberal subjects who are tightly governed but, paradoxically, define themselves as active, entrepreneurial agents (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Leathwood & Read, 2013). Our own experiences as academics indicate that many of us reflexively contest the discourse of

neoliberalism and criticise specific practices in our workplaces as products of neoliberalism but, at the same time, reproduce the discourse and inscribe ourselves within it as neoliberal subjects in a myriad of everyday work practices. We do this, for instance, when we apply for external funding, when we strive conscientiously to meet demands for performance ‘outputs’ in the form of publications in bibliometrically registered outlets, when we feel shame for not having published ‘enough’ to meet those demands, or when we state publically how we will take students’ evaluations of our courses into account as if we have sold student-consumers a product requiring quality control. Empirical research suggests that our own experiences are part of a general tendency. For example, Leathwood and Read conclude on the basis of a study of academics’ responses to research policy trends that ‘despite high levels of contestation [...] all academics in this study were complying with the demands of research audit and performativity’ (2013, p. 1172).

Through exploration of the context-specific tensions emergent in the construction of knowledge forms, social relations and subjectivities in the ‘co’ of co-creation in a higher educational institution in the current socio-political conjuncture, the article is designed to meet two overarching goals. One of the goals is to contribute to the field of research and practice that de-romanticises co-creation and critically interrogates the play of power/knowledge in the dialogic turn in a range of social practices including collaborative teaching and research practices, communication for social change, and public engagement with science and technology (e.g., Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Gallagher, 2008; Phillips, 2011; Phillips et al., 2013; Dutta & Pal, 2010; Stirling, 2008). The other goal is to contribute to the body of research on the ways in which neoliberalism permeates practices and subjectivities, rendering active resistance so difficult (e.g., Davies et al., 2006; Davies & Bansel, 2007, 2010; Gill, 2010; Leathwood & Read, 2013; Shore, 2010; Shore & Wright, 2000; Strathern, 2000). With respect to both goals, our approach is a critical, reflexive one in which we, at one and the same time, critically interrogate the context-specific tensions immanent in the “co” *and* engage in co-creation from a normatively supportive position that is alert to the potential of ‘co-creation’ and critical of the effects of neo-liberalism. We understand critical,

reflexive analysis as a basis for generating theory that contributes *both* to research on the dialogic turn and neoliberalised conditions for knowledge production *and* to the further development of methods for designing and facilitating practices of co-creation as a counterweight to the neoliberal individualisation and instrumentalisation of knowledge production.

We briefly outline the main features of Academic Co-Creative Inquiry (ACCI) as an approach to inquiry-based learning, the socio-political context of the study, and our theoretical framework, the Integrated Framework for Analysing Dialogic Knowledge Production and Communication (IFADIA). Then we apply IFADIA in analysis of the context-specific tensions in play in the use of ACCI in a higher educational institution in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the discussion and conclusion, we consider ways in which our analysis can contribute to critical-reflexive interrogation of context-specific tensions in the ‘co’ of co-creation in the current sociopolitical conjuncture, including tensions stemming from the impact of neoliberal managerial regimes on teaching and research practices.

### **Inquiry-based learning and ACCI**

‘Inquiry-based learning’ (or IBL) is used in the literature as a label for a plurality of approaches, and there are a number of alternative labels in circulation to describe some of those approaches (e.g. ‘enquiry-based learning’, ‘guided-inquiry’ and ‘problem-based learning’ (Spronken-Smith & Walker, 2010). Across their diversity, writings on IBL converge in acknowledging the historical roots in the seminal thinking of Dewey (1933) and in identifying the following defining characteristics: learning that is structured as an inquiry designed to address specific questions or problems; learning as the construction of new knowledge and understanding; ‘learning by doing’; student-centred learning with the teacher as facilitator; and self-directed learning whereby students take responsibility for their own learning (Spronken-Smith & Walker, 2010, p. 726). In inquiry-



based learning, then, the traditional understanding of the teacher as disseminator of a fixed package of authorised expert knowledge is replaced by the notion of the teacher as facilitator of the self-directed learner's construction of new knowledge and new understanding in interplay with their existing knowledges and experiences (e.g., Brew, 2003; Deignan, 2009; Spronken-Smith & Walker, 2010). Hence the role of the teacher shifts from the 'sage on the stage' to "the guide on the side" (King, 1993). The teacher becomes a co-learner, and the classroom a space for collaborative, mutual learning – a 'community of inquiry' (Lipman 2003). Inquiry-based learning is well suited to contemporary social work education since contemporary social work practice belongs to the dialogic turn whereby clients are, at least in principle, empowered as active agents in improving the quality of their lives through the client's and social worker's co-creation of plans for action in collaborative decision-making, a process in which more weight is placed on the client's strengths, abilities and resilience than on pathology, deficits and lack of resources.

Academic Co-Creative Inquiry (ACCI) possesses the main defining characteristics of inquiry-based learning. It has been inspired by Co-operative Inquiry, a branch of Action Research (e.g., Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2006), and developed by the second author for use in social work education (e.g., Napan, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2014). It is driven by the idea of 'bringing forth the world' (Capra, 1996) through global vision and local action (Napan, 2013).

In common with other approaches to inquiry-based learning, ACCI is constructed within the terms of the discourse of dialogue whereby student learning is understood as a student-directed activity in which students acquire new knowledge in dialogic processes of mutual learning. Social work courses are designed as platforms for co-learning to which the teacher and students bring different understandings of the topic (Napan, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2014). Thus the 'co' in 'co-creative inquiry' refers to a collaborative process of inquiry through which mutual learning occurs in dialogue across different constructions of the object of inquiry. A main feature of ACCI is that teachers and students, through collaboration, co-create the content and process for the courses and jointly assess the process of learning and the content.

Central to ACCI – and in common with all articulations of the discourse of dialogue (see Deetz & Simpson 2004, p.141; Pauly 2004, p.246; Phillips, 2011, p. 1; Roberts 2002, p. 7) - is the normative hope that co-existence across difference and the generation of new knowledge can be furthered by dialogue through its harnessing of difference as a transformative force. In line with this aspiration, the classroom is designed as a space for dialogic processes of mutual learning based on principles of respect among all participants across differences including those relating to ethnicity, religion, gender and generation. Through the establishment of collaborative relationships with each other, the idea is that students gain experience of the value and complexities of collaborative relating which they will be able to draw on as qualified social workers. As Napan puts it (2013, p. 287), the assumption is that '[p]ractising collaboration while studying will increase students' ability to form collaborative and respectful partnerships with their clients'. Students, it is hoped, will learn to become collaborative social workers who respect clients' different norms and will not try to impose or force their own norms upon them.

Successful co-creation in the classroom, according to ACCI, entails mutual respect, curiosity, sensitivity to emergent processes and an absence of preconceptions about the outcome of the co-learning processes. The establishment of trust among participants is crucial – both in each other and in the process of co-learning; trust provides scaffolding for 'whole people' learning, contributing to the development of personal and professional integrity as social workers (Napan, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2014).

Main features of ACCI are that students personalise prescribed learning outcomes into inquiry questions, choose the format and content of their assignments, there are no formal exams unless a student requests them, and all assignments are peer and self-assessed. The content and the process of the course are continuously assessed through spontaneous anonymous feedback and through formal surveys mid-course and at the end of the course.

Principles of co-operative inquiry are adapted in ACCI in order to fit the organisational context of higher education which stipulates a range of conditions. Adaptation of

cooperative inquiry to fit those conditions involves explicit recognition of the authority of the teacher as a representative of the educational institution. ACCI works through an interplay between bottom-up and top-down dynamics as the teacher, on the one hand, opens up for dialogic processes of mutual learning across multiple knowledge forms, and on the other hand, manages those processes within a framework set by organisational conditions. This interplay creates tensions which we interrogate in our analysis.

### **The Aotearoa New Zealand context: a contested discursive terrain**

The use of the theoretical framework IFADIA (outlined in the next section) in analysis of the tensions in working with ACCI in a higher educational institution in Aotearoa New Zealand involves attention to the context-specificity of the discourses of dialogue and neoliberalism. While neoliberalism obviously permeates higher education around the globe, its historical roots go particularly deep in Aotearoa New Zealand; in the 1980s, Aotearoa New Zealand was a pioneer in the installation of neoliberal apparatuses in higher education and the concomitant commercialisation and privatisation of teaching and research (Robertson & Dale, 2002; Shore, 2010). Today, according to Shore's (2010) analysis, the neoliberal discourse of the knowledge economy is the dominant discourse in higher education in Aotearoa New Zealand. The institutionalisation of neoliberal discourse includes the installation of New Public Management regimes of strategic planning, measurement and the monitoring of performance. Here, a central place is given to 'performance indicators, quality assurance measures and academic audits' (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p.1). In the 'audit culture' of New Public Management, all aspects of research and teaching are subjected to measurement in terms of quantifiable 'outputs' (Gill, 2009; Power, 1994; Strathern, 2000). Academic staff are discursively inscribed as personally accountable, 'responsibilised', self-monitoring and self-regulating subjects (Davies & Bansel, 2010; Gill, 2009; Strathern, 2000), and

students are, at least to some extent, inscribed as consumers of a product for which, in the case of Aotearoa New Zealand, they have paid.

At the same time, as Shore (2010) points out, neo-liberal discourse is co-articulated with a number of different policy discourses that put forward multiple, competing purposes and roles for higher education, including the purpose of educating the people for active, informed citizenship and the role of public service that meets the needs of the local community. To highlight the multi-purpose nature of universities, the term ‘multiversities’ is often used (Fallis, 2011; Shore, 2010). And, to stress the tensions caused by pressure to live up to conflicting roles and contradictory purposes, Shore (2010) has coined the term the ‘schizophrenic university’. Neoliberal and dialogic discourses in Aotearoa New Zealand higher education, then, inhabit a tension-ridden, polyphonic terrain of multiple discourses.

The discourse of dialogue articulated in ACCI constructs the higher educational institution as a means to educate citizens and as a community service. The discourse is profoundly shaped by biculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand. Biculturalism views New Zealanders as two peoples who co-exist – Māori who are ‘tangata whenua’ (translated as ‘the people of the land’) and non-Māori who are ‘tauwiwi’ - that is, all the others who arrived after Māori. Like neoliberalism, the local, situated articulation of the discourse of dialogue contains contradictory elements. The discourse of dialogue and the neo-liberal discourse of the knowledge economy are countertendencies of each other and thus are sometimes articulated in oppositional, conflictual relations. But the two discourses are also sometimes co-articulated without conflict because they are intertwined and congruent with respect to the construction of objects and subjectivities: *both* discourses value ‘co-creation’; both position the student as self-directed, responsabilised agent in learning processes and the teacher as facilitator of that learning; both advocate the creation of socially relevant, practice-oriented knowledge as a purpose of education. Thus there is a risk that, in the practice of ACCI in a context permeated by neo-liberalism, ‘dialogue’ is co-opted by neo-

liberalism through the co-articulation of the discourse of dialogue and the neo-liberal discourse of the knowledge economy.

Our analysis explores the complexities and contradictions in the countertendencies of neoliberalism and dialogism and their interrelations in terms of tensions that emerge in the use of academic co-creative inquiry in the third year social work degree course.

## **Theoretical framework**

Our theoretical framework, The Integrated Framework for Analysing Dialogic Knowledge Production and Communication (IFADIA) (Phillips, 2011), is an integrated framework constructed through the incorporation - and resulting transformation - of elements from Dialogic Communication Theory, Action Research, and Science and Technology Studies.

From dialogic communication theory, IFADIA incorporates Bakhtin's (1981) conceptualisation of dialogue as relational meaning-making whereby meaning is formed across multiple – and often contradictory and opposing – voices; meaning-making, then, is multi-voiced or 'polyphonic'. In polyphonic meaning-making, a struggle takes place between centrifugal and centripetal tendencies towards, respectively, difference and unity. In Bakhtin's understanding, voices are not just the media for speech or the uttered speech of embodied persons but also discourses, ideologies, perspectives or themes (Bakhtin, 1981; Clark and Holquist, 1984). Meaning-making is tensional and dialogic as it is produced through the polyphonic play of multiple voices, and people can articulate many voices, including contradictory ones constructing competing knowledges and identities. IFADIA goes much further down a poststructuralist path than dialogic communication theories in drawing on a discourse analytical approach that asserts that our knowledge of the world, including our experience of self and others, is constructed in discourses; discourses ascribe meanings to the world from particular perspectives and are always historically

and geographically contingent (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). This poststructuralist development of dialogic communication theory is at the core of IFADIA's analytical lens.

In the construction of IFADIA, applying a poststructuralist perspective to dialogic communication theories led to modification of the theories on the basis of a critique with respect to power. While dialogic communication theories are not explicitly committed to the ideal of dialogue as a power-free zone and indeed sometimes refute the possibility of achieving equality in any relationship (Phillips, 2011), they do not theorise power in a Foucauldian sense as an omnipresent social force at work in all forms of communication. Although dialogue is linked to power in most theories of dialogue, the linkage is often left largely unexplored (Hammond et al., 2003). By adding a poststructuralist, Foucauldian understanding of the inexorable workings of power/knowledge, IFADIA becomes analytically equipped for, and oriented towards, exploration of the ways in which the inevitable operation of power/knowledge works, through the articulation of discourses in the context-specific enactment of 'dialogue', to enable, and set the boundaries for, the action of all participants. This underpins an empirical focus on how the discourse of dialogue itself constitutes a form of governance in which knowledge, power and subjectivities are constructed in particular ways that marginalise or exclude other ways of being, knowing and doing (Foucault, 1972, 1977, 1980). The analytical lens homes in on the interplay of dominant voices, articulating dominant, authorised knowledges, and subordinate voices, articulating subjugated knowledges that are unacknowledged as knowledge or treated as inferior (Foucault, 2003).

To sharpen the analytical lens of IFADIA with respect to the operation of power/knowledge in the discourse of dialogue, IFADIA incorporates insights from action research and science and technology studies which both offer distinctive perspectives on dialogue-based approaches to producing knowledge. Action research provides insights into the tensions that can arise in the co-creation of knowledge among researchers and collaborating research participants/co-researchers. Central here are tensions between the instrumental use of dialogue to achieve pre-defined goals, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, dialogue as a basis for co-creating

knowledge through processes of mutual learning (Gaya Wicks & Reason, 2009; Spencer & Taylor, 2007; Thorpe, 2010). Science and technology studies provide insights based on detailed empirical analyses of tensions in public engagement with science initiatives in the incomplete shift to dialogue in the governance of science. An example is the tension between the top-down management of consultation processes to meet pre-set strategic goals that sometimes involve the privileging of scientific knowledge, on the one hand, and the bottom-up opening up for the articulation of citizens' own knowledge forms, on the other (Delgado et al., 2010; Irwin, 2006; Wynne, 2006).

IFADIA also contains a call for reflexivity about the inevitable operation of dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, and advocates reflexive analysis building on empirical, context- and complexity-sensitive study of the tensions in dialogue and collaboration. It follows a Foucauldian critical approach that interrogates the play of power/knowledge in the articulation of 'dialogue', but, at the same time, it treats critique as the basis for reflexive considerations that can lead to the further development of dialogic practices from a position normatively supportive of the dialogic turn. In particular, it supports two central normative promises of dialogism: to further human co-existence across differences (ethnic, social, generational, professional, theoretical, political, and so on) by harnessing difference as a generative force; and to democratise expertise by challenging the monopoly of authorised knowledge and encouraging a plurality of knowledges, including marginalised ways of knowing (Phillips, 2011).

The intention is that reflexivity about the production of power/knowledge in the discourse of dialogue can form a platform for a destabilisation of discourse that can open up for practice change in a particular, normatively prescribed, direction. It is not meant as a basis for eradicating exclusion; according to the Foucauldian perspective, a dominance-free zone for equal relations is an impossibility and the dominance of certain voices over others is not only inevitable but not necessarily a problem.

Directed at exploring the tensions in the contextual enactment of ‘dialogue’, IFADIA’s analytical lens addresses the following empirical questions:

- *What voices – discourses constructing specific knowledges and subjectivities – are articulated in practices of knowledge production and communication and when and how are they articulated and heard?*
- *To what extent, when, and how, do the interactions among actors open up for the polyphonic articulation of multiple voices that construct plural forms of knowledge?*
- *To what extent, when, and how do the interactions circumscribe the opening up for different voices, and, along monological lines, construct a singular “we” and a singular form of knowledge?*

Our analysis is the product of the application of two methods of data production: participant observation, and audio recording of the third year social work degree course on advanced social work principles which forms the object of analysis. The social work course consisted of 12 weekly morning workshops and 12 weekly two-hour lectures in the afternoons. There were 69 students enrolled on the course. For part of the course, the second author taught the course with another lecturer. Each lecturer ran a morning workshop with half of the students on the course; in the afternoon lectures, all students attended and the two lecturers divided the lectures between them. The article is based on analysis by the two authors of the morning workshops run by the second author, building on participant observation by the first author. Also, it draws more widely on the second author’s reflections on her use of ACCI over the past 10 years in a range of different bachelor and masters level courses in social work education. We informed students on the course that the use of ACCI on the course – including interaction amongst them as course participants – represented the object of analysis in the research project and that the first author was a participant observer on the course. All the students gave their consent to use their interactional exchanges, stories and comments providing they remained anonymous.



Applying IFADIA in interaction with the empirical field, our analytical focus is on the ways in which the course, through the interplay between bottom-up and top-down dynamics, opens up for dialogue across a polyphonic plurality of voices, and on the ways in which it excludes voices and thus privileges certain ways of being, knowing and doing and marginalises others. We pay special attention to the workings of power/knowledge in the discursive construction of co-creation within a socio-political conjuncture and organisational context in which discourses of dialogism and neoliberalism are pervasive and intermeshed.

### **Analysing tensions in the interplay between top-down and bottom-up dynamics**

Tensions arose in the interplay between top-down and bottom-up dynamics in the use of ACCI in three main areas: the design/process of course sessions, the formulation of learning contracts, and the assessment of students. In addition, the organisational context impinged in top-down fashion on the running of the course.

#### ***Co-design of the process***

Bottom-up dynamics are articulated in the formulation of a Group Treaty whereby students co-create a set of rules of conduct for the course, including whether mobile phones and other electronic devices can be used during class, whether there should be formal openings and closings for each session, who should be responsible for the openings and closings, how they should handle questions of confidentiality in relation to sensitive topics, and whether children and pets should be allowed to attend course sessions and, if so, what the rules for attendance should be (for instance, that children should not be present when the topic of discussion is not age-appropriate and that it is the responsibility of parents that they do not disrupt the class). Openings and closings are widespread across diverse organisational contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand and represent the

institutionalisation of Māori ritual, and, often, recognition of the value of indigenous Māori practices and knowledge. Various openings are suggested and made by students including the reading of poems, and sharing of zen koans and anecdotes. Closings mainly take the form of recaps for the day and comments on threads of unfinished discussions to be continued the following week.

Bottom-up processes are also in play in relation to group presentations, as students form groups around their areas of interest, and plan and organise group presentations on themes of their own choosing within the bounds of prescribed learning outcomes. In the group presentations, the presenting group facilitates a discussion about the chosen topic, and the rest of the class and the teacher fill in the gaps in order to further the fulfilment of the learning outcome in focus. The presenting group is encouraged to facilitate a class discussion, enabling students to practise facilitation techniques that represent a key method of effective social work.

The co-creation of rules of conduct and of the design of group presentations opens up for the possibility of multiple voices constructing plural forms of knowledge. At the same time, closure takes place with respect to the polyphonic articulation of multiple voices through top-down dynamics working through the imposition of certain requirements such as the requirement to make group presentations. Moreover, while the co-creation of rules of conduct and of the design of group presentations opens up for the articulation of multiple voices, the discourse of dialogue is privileged over other voices since the co-design of the course facilitates the creation of a space for co-learning based on the establishment of collaborative relationships in line with ACCI's dialogic principles. The aim of ACCI is that students, through the establishment of collaborative relationships with each other in the classroom, will learn to become social workers who strive, and are able, to establish collaborative relationships with their clients and who respect clients' possibly different norms and refrain from imposing their own norms. The goal is that they will adopt the subjectivity of *collaborative* social workers, positioning themselves as agents of social change and positioning clients in dialogic relations that facilitate the 'empowerment' of clients in the sense of greater control over their lives and an expanded scope for action.

Bottom-up and top-down dynamics are also embedded in the design of each course session, consisting of a combination of teacher presentations, group work and plenum discussions. The facilitation methods of the teacher play a crucial role in opening up for the polyphonic articulation of multiple voices within and across teacher presentations, group work and plenum discussions. Through inquiry questions, for instance, the teacher strives to facilitate dialogue across multiple voices articulating theoretical, practical and experiential knowledges. The discourse of dialogue emphasises the quality of the relations established in spaces for mutual learning, and it constructs co-learning as a democratic process designed to empower the student as a participant in processes of co-learning as opposed to a recipient at the receiving-end of a canon of expert knowledge.

One instance in which a student who was usually quiet in class was positioned as active co-learner occurred when the teacher and students co-created a case-study in order to explore the use of a range of theories in social practice. The teacher suggested potential actors, and students came up with a story which included a stepfather fathering a child to his 16 year old stepdaughter. A group of students put forward the view that, as social workers, according to NZ law, if the intercourse was consensual and the stepdaughter was 16, they might have the role of supporting a young mother but no police involvement would be required. This view created a heated reaction from the class, and a student who generally said very little or nothing in course sessions, carried out an internet search and e-mailed an excerpt from the Criminal Act which clearly states that there is a penalty of imprisonment for anyone who has, or attempts, sexual intercourse with any girl who is under the age of 20 and who is his step-daughter, foster daughter or ward, and is, at the time of the intercourse or attempted intercourse, living with him as a member of his family. When this was shared with the class, a discussion took place which spotted that the law here mentions only girls, not boys. This opened up for exploration of links between competent social work practice and the importance of knowing about legislation. It also allowed a very quiet student to speak up and contribute new knowledge.

Here, ACCI led to meaning-making that was oppositional to neoliberalism through its emphasis on the quality of the process of co-learning – as opposed to auditable, quantifiable outputs. Attempts were made to further the quality of the co-learning process through the teacher's attention to the emergent in the classroom with a view to cultivating relations of trust and mutual respect that allow for dialogue across difference, where difference is harnessed as a transformative force generating new knowledge. Through attention to the emergent, the teacher could pick up spontaneously on comments by students and use them in order to facilitate critical interrogation among participants of the politics and ethics of normativity and power in social worker-client relations and encourage reflexive consideration of the ways in which normativity and power can be tackled constructively in building collaborative social worker-client relations.

In the following example, attention to the emergent led to the generation of new knowledge through the critical questioning of taken-for-granted, naturalised discourses in relation to social work practice. The teacher utilised a case given by students in their group presentation in order to co-construct a case-study which related theory to practice. The case was about the ethics of a social worker with strong anti-abortion views in relation to her work with a young couple who wanted an abortion; the teacher used this example as a case-study for group work where students were invited to examine their beliefs and envisage how they would address the issue.

Through the above two cases and other similar ones, ACCI challenged the neoliberal instrumentalisation of learning with its reduction of knowledge to 'competences' for carrying out stipulated tasks.

At the same time, the combination of the neoliberal individualisation of responsibility and positioning of students as consumers of products may reinforce patterns in the classroom where certain students are vocal and others are quiet. Here, ACCI's discourse of dialogue may contribute to this since it also individualises responsibility for students' learning. However, through the emphasis in ACCI on the quality of the co-learning process, and in particular, the establishment of relations of trust and mutual respect, those patterns may be destabilised as in the case of the quiet

student who was motivated to seek information and inform the class about legislation on stepfather-stepdaughter sexual relations.

During the course, students challenged teaching methods when they considered that they clashed with principles of dialogue. Hence they inscribed themselves as subjects within a dialogic discourse not just in relation to the academic content of the course but also with respect to teaching methods. The teacher encouraged a critical gaze on teaching methods, for example, by inviting students to place anonymous feedback or suggestions in a box on her desk at any point throughout the course and also by carefully responding to email comments and taking them into account in future practices. This ongoing critical, reflexive scrutiny of the course itself, then, was a channel for co-creation.

### ***Co-creation of learning contracts***

Bottom-up and top-down dynamics are also in play in the formulation of *learning contracts*. In top-down fashion, the prescribed learning outcomes are set by the teacher to fit a graduate profile that meets the conditions of the degree-issuing authority; they are often perceived by students as dry and formal. They are based on a singular ‘we’ and a singular form of knowledge emanating from the prescribed curriculum. At the same time, there is a bottom-up opening-up for plural knowledges through students’ personalisation of learning outcomes in learning contracts in line with their own knowledges, experiences and knowledge interests (Knowles, 1986). In learning contracts, students phrase learning outcomes in the form of a question for inquiry which builds on, and is relevant to, their existing knowledges, their personal, academic and professional experiences and their career aspirations. Phrasing learning outcomes as inquiry questions in relation to issues which students find interesting and relevant shifts students into an inquiry mode as co-learners as opposed to the mode of consumers of existing knowledge. Learning contracts also encourage the subjectification

of students as active co-learners in an inquiry process through the requirement to define their learning resources and obstacles, to set assignment dates, and to decide on the formats of, and grading criteria for, assignments. Moreover, students set their own deadlines within prescribed academic limits and practise time-management skills essential for effective social work practice.

### ***Co-creation of assessment criteria***

Bottom-up and top-down dynamics are at work in the co-creation of assessment criteria through negotiation between criteria based on the prescribed course learning outcomes and students' chosen criteria, and through the use of peer assessment which the teacher takes into account in grading. The aim here is to render student learning relevant and meaningful to students in the light of their backgrounds and their life and career trajectories. There are no examinations and there is a lot of choice with respect to assignments. Assignments can take the form of creative exercises including writing as a method of inquiry, production of films, and artwork, and they can be done individually, in pairs or in small groups. Students can choose if they want to be assessed as a group (one grade for all) or as individuals in a group (each student receives an individual grade based on their contribution to the presentation). The assignment of grades and peer- and self -assessment are based on a comparison between what students set out to do as stated in their learning contract and what they have achieved on the course. While it is the teacher who assigns the grade, she takes into account peer- and self-assessment as well as her own assessment. This opens up for the potential articulation of voices rooted in students' experiences outside as well as inside the university within the terms of the discourse of dialogue. Peer- and self-assessment (see example 1) resembles collaborative appraisal processes in social work (Napan, 2013) and is used in order to encourage collaborative learning, reflexive practices and a sense of responsibility for the collective project in line with dialogic principles.

## Example 1: Self-assessment

### Advanced Theories and Principles in Social Work

#### Guidelines for self-reflection (presentation)

- 1. How have you covered Learning outcome 3 (Demonstrate an understanding of the inter-relationship between theory, practice and research) in your presentation?**

Our presentation followed a lot of theories used to understand our topic and how research and social context has evolved them and how this relates to practice.

- 2. How is the way you've covered it relevant for your future social practice?**

It is important to realise how the way we view 'problems' are always evolving within our society and how valuable research is as a tool for discovering how effective is our current way of doing things and what could be done better.

- 3. What have you done well?**

I was able to analyse my research report and reduce it down to the most important points. This was a 40 page report that I reduced to a page so I had to choose what was most relevant. I think I did that well. I also received comments from my teammates that I was eloquent when I was presenting on the day.

- 4. What would you do differently next time?**

The thing I was most unhappy about with regards to my group contribution is the fact that I did not speak up during question time. This is something I have always had difficulty with but I believe that I need to learn to overcome it and be confident to speak up.

- 5. Are you happy with the level of co-operation in your group?**

I think our group were very co-operative. Although we all had our own individual tasks to do – we shared our own content with the group and had feedback and dialogue to make sure that everyone agreed with the content and that it flowed well. All feedback given within the group was useful and constructive. Everyone was committed to doing their own part as well as working within the group to bring the whole thing together.

- 6. If possible, reach a consensus through dialogue with your colleagues in terms of how much input did you have in the creation of it.**

My group thinks I contributed: 16.66 /100 (group of 6)

I think I contributed: 14 /100

- 7. Please comment on the process of bringing this presentation to life and the process of reaching consensus when assigning percentages to individual inputs (minimum 500 words)**

As discussed previously we all had an individual part to work on, which we chose, then we went away and worked on that then brought it back to the group as a whole to discuss and fit it in in a way that flowed nicely. We communicated via email as well as group meetings within and outside

of class. The group were all very committed and were willing to work around each other schedules and use out of class and holiday time for meetings.

I was unwell for a lot of the time during the group process, therefore it was difficult sometimes for me to be fully present within group discussions. My particular part was smaller than others although I did spend a lot of time reading over the report I was given to pick out the most relevant points – I did not have to do any outside research but did try to research what is the Fremo tool I mentioned in my piece but was unable to locate anything that explained it. I also felt that during questions at the end of the presentation that I could've spoken up as I did have some things to add but I didn't. Therefore although I did my best I feel that I did a less than equal share.

The amount of contribution to the presentation was not necessarily entirely visible. Some of the presenters had a lot more to say than others but there was a lot of extra work done behind the scenes that was not obvious on presentation day. For example, Tina, who is highly organised, was the group facilitator. (...) put the group powerpoint together and put in all the puzzle piece graphics herself. Discussing the research reports, while they did not require outside research, took a long time to analyse and simplify as they were very long. Also as mentioned, we all contributed in group discussions giving feedback and suggestions on each others pieces. It was because of all this collaboration that the group as a whole felt that we each inputted roughly equal contributions. While I felt I contributed a little bit less due to illness and other factors I did not bring it up as I knew the rest of the group would try to convince me otherwise. However I have no disagreement with the contributions of the rest of the group as I did feel there was roughly equal from all.

I was very happy to be a part of this group and with the process and outcome of this assignment. I felt that we worked together and were able to utilise each other's strengths to bring together a strong and informative presentation. I felt that even when there was disagreement over what to include it was addressed in a very respectful manner and we were able to come to a consensus without too much difficulty. There was a lot of trust and caring. I felt comfortable enough to notify my group of my personal circumstances limiting my performance and they were very supportive.

#### **8. What did you learn and how is this relevant for your future practice?**

From the presentation content I learnt a lot about the value of research in social practice to evaluate treatment programmes and how they can be improved. I also learnt a lot about how a problem such as sexual deviancy has evolved in our society and what this means for how we work with clients. I also believe this group process was the best I've been involved in and one of the reasons for that is that each person played to their strengths, so I learnt that this is a way that people can be brought together to work united on a project. This idea can be taken into practice when working with clients.

While the experience of self- and peer reflections resembles social work appraisal processes and prepares students to give and receive feedback respectfully with the aim of improving practice, it puts students on the spot and requires them to do something that is traditionally a 'teacher's job'. As the second author was challenged by students on earlier courses in relation to this, she made an agreement with students to call this process self- and peer- reflection in this particular course and not ask students to assign grades to each other, but instead give relevant



feedback designed to help fellow students to improve their assignments. Those who planned their time well were thus given a chance to improve their assignments on the basis of the feedback.

ACCI's ascription to students of individual responsibility for their own learning aligns with neo-liberalism's construction of individualised, responsabilised, self-monitoring and self-motivating subjects. In both ACCI's discourse of dialogue and neoliberal discourse, the participant is constructed as a self-directed co-learner. In the discourse of dialogue, the co-learner is empowered as an agent of social change, and, in the neoliberal discourse of the knowledge economy, the co-learner is trained for flexible work generating social and cultural innovation in the service of the needs of the knowledge economy. When students position themselves within neoliberal discourse as consumers of a product for which they have paid, this may produce expectations to pass the course which put pressure on the teacher to give way to instrumental goal-achievement. This is reinforced by the expectations of management - also within neoliberal discourse - that teachers should pass students in order to satisfy the performance targets laid down in the strategy plans and secure continued income through student fees. At the same time, ACCI's use of self- and peer assessment may help to counteract that instrumentalisation since it places emphasis on the importance of the quality of processes of co-learning as opposed to the ascription of grades by an external authority.

### ***Organisational context***

The co-articulation of neoliberal and dialogic discourses causes tensions through the contextualisation of the course in the organisation. For instance, workshops are placed in the mornings before the afternoon lectures through a top-down administrative decision based on the availability of lecture rooms; the tension between this aspect and the application of ACCI principles is in play in the difficulties that the teacher experiences in facilitating discussion of topics before they have been presented in the lecture.

Other aspects of the neo-liberalised organisational context in tension with ACCI are classes with too many students and too little time. These features work against the establishment of spaces based on relations of trust and mutual respect where quieter or reticent students feel comfortable to participate actively. However, balancing and coping with bottom-up and top-down dynamics is the essence of effective social working since social workers aim to further social change and social justice under conditions that often lead to their positioning as agents of social control. Awareness of the tensions arising in the interplay between bottom-up and top-down dynamics during the course may enable future social workers to recognise similar tensions in social work practice and address them for the benefit of their clients and the communities they serve.

Another source of tension was the decision by departmental management to replace one of the two course teachers (the course teacher whose morning workshops are not '' analysed in this article), following very critical mid-course feedback. The end-of-year feedback indicated that students considered that, in the making of this decision, their voices had been heard, taken seriously and acted upon. This management decision, then, can be understood as a dialogic move in that it entailed the recognition of a critical, student voice and led to practice change in line with that voice. At the same time, the decision can also be understood as an expression of the 'customer is always right' stance of neoliberal, consumerist discourse. And the fact that the replaced teacher had not been properly trained to teach in the inquiry mode and had been imposed on the course coordinator can be seen as an expression of New Public Management with its neoliberal preoccupation with outputs and its deprofessionalisation of the academy (Lorenz, 2012).

### **Tensions within the discourse of dialogue**

Tensions emerged too *within the terms of* the discourse of dialogue, unconnected with neoliberal discourse. We note the context-specificity of these tensions. The discourse of dialogue articulated in ACCI is profoundly shaped by biculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand. As mentioned above,

biculturalism, as an ideal, views Aotearoa New Zealanders as two peoples who co-exist – Māori who are the people of the land and non-Māori who are all other settlers who arrived later<sup>1</sup>. The idea of multiculturalism (which increasingly permeates the globalised western world) privileges the majority in the position of power and subsumes indigenous peoples under the umbrella of the “other”, which, in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, entails that ‘there are many cultures in Aotearoa, one of which is Māori’; in contrast, the idea of biculturalism and a partnership between Māori and everybody else positively privileges the indigenous culture, and thus allows for a cultural revival and a position of power that is not common in other colonised countries. It also sets the stage for a substantive equality where a multiplicity of cultures are welcomed as partners to indigenous peoples, not partners to colonisers.

Obviously, there is a strong normative standpoint in the articulation of the discourse of dialogue on the course relating to the ethical imperative of treating difference as a positive transformative force, opening up for a plurality of voices and viewing the other with respect in order to further bicultural co-existence. But there is a tension within the discourse of dialogue between the opening up for a plurality of voices, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, closing down to exclude views that are antagonistic to the normative dialogic principle about openness to difference as the key to co-existence. This tension is illustrated in the next example.

As a part of the social work course, students attended the Pasifika Festival, an annual event celebrating Pacific Island cultures. As part of a group of transgender people, one of the students in the class participated actively in a ‘Love your Condom’ campaign at the festival, handing out free condoms and leaflets promoting safe sex. There was a male student in the class whose beliefs went against the use of condoms and, in the following interaction, criticised the safe sex campaign on the grounds that it encouraged promiscuity:

*Teacher: When we were at Pasifika [festival] did you notice anything similar?*

*Student 1: Love Your Condom [Campaign]*

*Student 2: It could also give the message that it's ok to have sex.*

*Teacher (to student 2): That was good you brought it up. But I think that Love Your Condom has nothing to do with promiscuity. When you are in a relationship you do have sex, you don't always have sex to have babies.*

*Student 1: It was just about safe sex, it's up to you and your mentality how you interpret it, thank you.*

*Teacher: There is a debate. I'm glad you brought it up. It's a question of interpretation. I'm not saying what's right and wrong here but that it is important that your message comes out clear. In that way you'll be able to build relationships with your community.*

The act of making an intervention is recognised as legitimate by the teacher: *That was good you brought it up; I'm glad you brought it up.* So in this sense there is a centrifugal opening up for difference and a plurality of voices. And this is supported by cultural relativism: *It's a question of interpretation. I'm not saying what's right and wrong here but that it is important that your message comes out clear.* But, at the same time, the teacher directly refutes the content of the intervention: *But I think that Love Your Condom has nothing to do with promiscuity.* So there is centripetal closure in the form of the dominance of a single voice and class 'we'. This is an example of the classic conundrum about the limits of dialogue in relation to voices that are in opposition to the normative principles of dialogue; voices that challenge dialogism's normativity are marginalised or excluded. The lecturer consciously left the topic open and chose not to facilitate the debate in the class as she assessed that it was too early in the development of this particular group to engage in dialogue about this topic (it was only the second week of the 12-week course). Polarising a class at this early stage of group formation was assessed as not beneficial; instead she chose to address it in the morning workshop the following week by focusing on assumptions, prejudices, respect and the acceptance of difference.

Conundrums are, of course, difficult if not impossible, to solve! We suggest a sensitivity to emergence as a strategy for tackling the conundrum of the limits of dialogue within the terms of the discourse of dialogue, as well as as a strategy for tackling the tensions in the co-articulation of neo-liberal and dialogic discourses in co-learning practices. We discuss this further in the discussion and conclusion.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

We have aimed in this article to contribute to critical research and practice on dialogic practices by illustrating how critical, reflexive analysis of the ‘co’ in ‘co-creation’ can provide insight into contextually specific, emergent tensions in the interplay between top-down and bottom-up dynamics in a particular socio-political conjuncture and organisational context . We have also aimed to generate insights that contribute to research on the specific ways in which neoliberalism penetrates practices and subjectivities and hinders active resistance.

Emergence comes from the Latin verb to ‘emergere’, meaning to become visible or known, to rise to the surface or come into view (Phillips & Kristiansen, 2013). Here, we use the concept of emergence in relation to unforeseen, tensional situations which arise during the process and which may contribute to, or detract from, co-creative learning in ways that were not planned or predicted initially. As facilitators of co-learning processes, teachers have to pay attention not only to ideas and knowledge-claims but also to disconcerting, gut feelings (MacLure, 2011); they have to be curious, empathic, and inclusive towards students, and they have to be able to go with the flow and re-organise the process when new situations emerge.

Reflexive sensitivity to emergence is crucial because, in practices of co-creation, the teacher, in principle, relinquishes control of the process and opens up for polyphony, while still managing the process in order to meet course goals. Sensitivity to emergence can be used by the teacher-facilitator as a strategy for reflexively attending to the play of voices and continually trying

to open up for new voices, while, at the same time, acknowledging that exclusion is inevitable in the struggle between centrifugal forces pushing for difference and centripetal forces moving towards unity.

By paying attention to their own emotions and observations and listening to and observing their own reactions in relation to students and reflecting on them, teachers become co-learners. Inner dialogue leads to different ways of acting during the co-creation process. For instance, the teacher observes how students contribute with new knowledge and uses this as foundation for co-learning. This method worked well in the course based on ACCI analysed in this article. This is related to the abilities of the teacher. The polyphonic articulation of multiple knowledge forms and identities in a bicultural context is complex, and ACCI works best with experienced teachers with broad knowledge and associative minds. Good facilitation skills are essential. Openness, transparency and reflexivity about the grounds for particular teaching methods or interventions used are also important. If things appear to go wrong, open and transparent reflection on the events can be used as a basis for learning.

Reflexive sensitivity to emergence, we would argue, needs to involve paying attention not just to processual matters but also to the socio-culturally and temporally contingent content of the voices articulated in spaces of co-learning. In the polyphonic articulation of discourses, particular voices – discourse constructing specific knowledges and subjectivities - inevitably come to dominate and others are marginalised and excluded. The polyphonic space is populated with, and circumscribed by, voices/discourses belonging to the current socio-political conjuncture. In our analysis, using IFADIA as a theoretical lens, we have concentrated on tensions arising in the co-articulation of the discourses of neoliberalism and dialogue as well as within the discourse of dialogue itself.

We argue that sensitivity to how the polyphonic space is populated with, and circumscribed by, the discourse of neo-liberalism and discourse of dialogue can help us to attend to the precise ways in which practices and subjectivities in everyday teaching practices are permeated

with neoliberal discourse and sometimes intertwined in a symbiotic, rather than antagonistic, fashion with the discourse of dialogue. In the above analysis, this sensitivity drew our attention to how the discourse of dialogue was implicated in the reproduction of neoliberal knowing and subjectivities through its co-articulation with neoliberal discourse: both neoliberal discourse and the discourse of dialogue value 'co-creation', both position the student as self-directed, responsabilised agent in learning processes and the teacher as facilitator of that learning, and both advocate the creation of socially relevant, practice-oriented knowledge as a purpose of education. Davies & Bansel (2007, p. 258) point out that 'neoliberalism both competes with other discourses and also cannibalises them in such a way that neoliberalism itself appears more desirable or more innocent than it is'. The overlap or congruence between the discourses of neoliberalism and dialogue may underpin the ease with which neoliberalism colonises, and co-inhabits, collaborative practices - in some cases, devouring them from within.

It could be concluded that collaborative and co-creative practices may occur in spite of the neoliberal discourse in which we are inscribed. It could also be concluded that endlessly trying to make learning meaningful and relevant is an exhausting endeavour and that radically changing the system might address the issue better than trying to subvert it by negotiating with the rules. However, the analysed practices reflect the tension-ridden realities of social work, given that contemporary social work is also impregnated by the discourses of dialogue and neo-liberalism, and thus prepare students for their future work-lives.

The results of our analysis are in line with the growing body of poststructuralist research on education and neoliberalism which highlights how, as academics in the neoliberal educational institution, we are inscribed in, and thus reproduce, the discourse we criticise. Leathwood and Read describe the paradox well: 'Collectively as academics, we are enmeshed in endless contradictions: vehemently contesting audit technologies yet choosing to do so because of the pleasures it offers' (2013, p.1172). However, this is only part of the story. Our analysis showed not only that neoliberalism had penetrated ACCI practices, causing tensions, but also that ACCI, in

many respects, was oppositional to neoliberalism. The discourse of dialogue articulated in ACCI practices opened up for meaning-making that contested neoliberalism by its emphasis on the quality of the process of co-creation - as opposed to auditable, quantifiable outputs. And the quality of the process was enhanced by the teacher's careful attention to the emergent in the classroom as a basis for opening up for marginalised voices. Thus it can be argued that ACCI offers a set of practices that is resistant to neoliberalism.

Our analysis represents a destabilisation of discourse that is a form of ideological critique. As such, it is different from the active resistance to neo-liberalism in which many of us academics of the neoliberal university would like to engage. At the same time, ACCI's cultivation of reflexive sensitivity to emergence in relation to tensions in both process and content offers a form of critique that is practice-oriented: a critical, reflexive gaze is integrated into ACCI practices as a basis for making ongoing practice changes. The challenge is to continue developing dialogic practices of co-creation from a normatively supportive position, while retaining an ongoing critical, reflexive gaze that avoids the romanticisation of dialogue and tends the immanent tensions of 'co-creation' in the embattled discursive terrain of contemporary higher education.

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<sup>i</sup> This is a simplified way of addressing the complexities of bi-culturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand. To gain a more nuanced picture of bi-culturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand as a unique way of partnership between indigenous people and colonisers through a written document, the Treaty of Waitangi, see Adams (1977), Durie(1998), Moon (2002), Orange (1989),(1990), Scott (1975), Walker (2004), Simpson(1990), and Buick(1916).